

St Paul's Dorking (June/July 2021): Acts 1:1–13:5

Jesus had died – but been brought back to life again... Things weren't though quite the same as before – he didn't seem to be around all the time, but kept appearing and disappearing. Then after 40 days he left the earth physically and ascended into heaven, leaving his disciples **two promises**:

1. he would shortly send them his Holy Spirit, so that he would still remain present with them always;
2. he would in due course return to the earth, to announce the arrival of his eternal kingdom in all its glory.

And he also left them **one great commission**, to be carried out from the time of the first promise to the time of the second promise: to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), as his “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

So how did this (initially) small band of insignificant, confused Jews become the backbone of a worldwide movement which within 20 years had been accused of “turning the world upside down” (as many translations of Acts 17:6 put it)? That's what we're going to be exploring at St Paul's over the months of June and July as we work our way through Acts Chapters 1-13 – seeing how the early church **gathered** together, and how that gathering led on to **growth** (and more growth...) and to **going** out in ever-widening circles to share the good news of Jesus.

Luke and Acts

The author of the book of Acts was Luke, the same man who wrote one of the Gospels. And it's clear that Luke regards his two 'books' not as two separate entities but as one integrated package – two volumes telling the story of the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ, spanning both the 30-odd years of his physical life on earth and the first 30 years or so that followed it. Luke accordingly stresses (in Acts 1:1) that his Gospel is about all that Jesus *began* to do; the book of Acts then picks up what Jesus *continued* to do, as active by his Spirit as he had been in the flesh.

Whose 'Acts'?

The book of Acts picked up its traditional title of 'the Acts of the Apostles' quite early on, probably to distinguish it from other, apocryphal writings about the 'Acts' of various disciples which were not regarded as part of divinely-inspired Scripture. But this title misses the key point that the growth of the gospel was not ultimately a result of human power, and so an alternative title of 'the Acts of the Holy Spirit' is often now suggested. Actually, though, if we really want to identify whose 'acts' are being recounted here, we should be including *all three* persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) *and* the human element (which covers more than just the 12 apostles, with Barnabas, Stephen and Philip being among the 'contributors' we will be coming across over the coming weeks). This is very much a team effort!

St Paul's sermon series: 'Gathering as church'

The section of the book of Acts which we'll be looking at covers the first 15 years or so after the resurrection, when most of the activity described is relatively 'local' to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. (From chapter 13 onwards the mission 'to the ends of the earth' gathers pace, and the story focuses primarily, although not exclusively, on the missionary journeys of Paul – for many of which Luke himself became a travelling companion.)

At the time of writing these notes, the plan for our series is as follows:

6 th June	Acts 1:1-14	Gathering as church: in anticipation
13 th June	Acts 4:1-31	Gathering as church: with boldness
20 th June	Acts 4:32–5:11	Gathering as church: generously
27 th June	Acts 5:12-16	Gathering as church: to heal
4 th July	Acts 6:1-7	Gathering as church: to serve
11 th July	Acts 9:19b-31	Gathering as church: gathering in
18 th July	Acts 10:23b-48	Gathering as church: branching out
25 th July	Acts 13:1-5	Gathering as church: sending out

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